

POLITICAL GENEROSITY,

A PAPER READ BEFORE THE

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MR. CHAIRMAN AND GENTLEMEN :

There is a gloom hanging over our association to-night, for I am sure that there is no heart in this room that does not beat in sympathy with the millions of mankind who are mourning the recent death of the greatest statesman of our day—BENJAMIN DISRAELI, Earl of Beaconsfield.

The career of Lord Beaconsfield has not only been one of the most romantic and extraordinary in English political history, but it may well thrill each one of us with a sense of the ardour, devotion and patriotism of the dead statesman. Without the aid of wealth or brilliant family connections, he rose from the most unassuming position to be Leader of the House of Commons, chief adviser of Her Majesty the Queen, and the ruler of the destinies of Britain. He was, besides, a warm friend of Her Majesty, and one to whom she always looked up in time of trouble. He was twice called to the important office of Minister of Finance, and was twice Prime Minister.

He was a Conservative who was loved by the Liberals, for his gentlemanly demeanor and the liberality and kindness of his actions. He was a Tory who passed a more Radical Reform Bill than had been attempted by his opponents.

He is gone in a ripe old age, fallen asleep with his great mind undimmed to the last ; but the record of Benjamin Disraeli's life is a power which may honorably fire the breast of all youthful aspirants to political honor, and which will long fill countless hearts in the Old World and in the New, with admiration and respect for the memory of this most distinguished statesman.

I am not quite sure that I should have headed this evening's Essay with such a soft-sounding title, had I not felt that our party is at present in that most happy and enviable position where we can afford to be generous and charitably disposed towards all mankind, even including the honorable gentlemen of the Opposition. Were we at this moment the under dog, instead of the victorious canine on the top, no doubt my thoughts would have run in a narrower groove, and I should have expressed my feelings in a few short snarls and growls, instead of in the highly peaceable, moral and philanthropic strain in which I propose to address a few words to you on this occasion.

The limits of a brief article will not admit of my reviewing the long list of successes which have crowned the efforts of the present Government. I am not here to justify the Tariff Bill and its amendments, for I consider, gentlemen, that time and events have already sufficiently justified that great reform in the financial affairs of the Dominion of Canada. The National Policy is proving itself each day to be *the* great and true policy for the interests of this young and enterprising nation. Nor will I attempt to handle the threadbare topic of the Pacific Railway; though I firmly believe that Government has dealt with one of the grandest problems of the age in a masterly spirit which will not fail to bear its fruit in due season. So vast a scheme of trans-continental communication, and the colonization of the myriad fertile acres of the great North-west, needed consummate boldness and skill in its consideration, and has been, let us hope and believe, planned out and decided upon with greater wisdom and foresight than I am willing to attribute to the party that lately vacated the seat of power at Ottawa.

I am thankful for every good measure that has been passed, and thankful that we still rejoice in a leader worthy of the name. I say, gentlemen, may Sir John A. Macdonald long live to give our land of Canada the advantage of his brilliant statemanship!

“Such men are raised to station and command,
When Providence means mercy to a land.
He speaks and they appear; to Him they owe
Skill to direct, and strength to strike the blow;
To manage with address, to seize with power
The crisis of a dark decisive hour.”

No; the history of the present parliament is not for such a feeble pen as mine to attempt to deal with; but with your kind permission I will ask your attention to a few general inferences that have occurred to my mind from a review of the political situation. Has it ever occurred to you that not a few pit-falls exist, into which successful legislators are not unfrequently in much danger of falling? Now, I hope that the Conservative party, having attained so much, will not allow itself to fall into the error of over-legislating for a grateful people. Guard carefully and hold fast what is good; make reforms just so far as you can see your way clear; but, for Heaven's sake, gentlemen, don't let us frame a multiplicity of laws just for the sake of experimenting; and don't let us learn to think our own party, or our own individual selves infallible. Others are just as confident as we are of the truth of their own convictions. Our opponents are possessed of great intelligence,—many of them, no doubt are our equals, if not our superiors. We *may* be sometimes in the wrong. It is hard to realize the likelihood of our own selves being in the wrong in any matter, however small; but as the world contains “many men with many minds,” it naturally follows that the great majority of us must, as a matter of necessity, be in the wrong.

We look back into the past, and what do we see,—nations, sects, philosophers, cherishing beliefs in science, morals, politics and religion which we decisively reject. Yet they held and maintained their convictions with a faith in many instances far stronger than ours. And it is somewhat humiliating to be compelled to acknowledge that from a parity of reasoning, in the light of coming years, many of our fondest idols of to-day will be shattered and exposed by the stern truth of events.

I say, then, that in our public conduct there is at present an evident want of a little more practical humility. Though we have less self-confidence than our ancestors, who never hesitated to embody in law their pet notions and judgments upon any and all subjects whatever, we have yet far too much. Though fortunately for those whom the Church of England in her liturgy, calls "Jews, Turks, infidels and heretics," we have ceased to assume the absolute infallibility of our religious beliefs, we do not forget to enforce other beliefs of an equally doubtful kind. Though we no longer presume to coerce men for their *spiritual* good, we still think ourselves called upon to coerce them for their *material* good,—not seeing that the one is in truth as useless and unwarrantable as the other. Innumerable failures seem, so far, powerless to teach this. Take up a daily paper, and you will probably find a leading article exposing the corruption, negligence or mismanagement of some Government department. In the next column you will not unlikely find a demand for an extension of State supervision. A bank manager absconds. You must enact new banking laws. An engine explodes on the Grand Trunk, or a locomotive, attracted by the earth's centre of gravity, goes through ice to the bottom of the St. Lawrence; you must have more boiler inspectors appointed. Small-pox has broken out; you must purify the poisonous atmosphere by legislation. The sidewalk has flown up, and struck an after-dinner alderman in the face; you must either abolish plank sidewalks by act of Parliament, or impose prohibitory legislation on the food and drink, especially the latter,—composing that worthy official's repast. You might as well try to stop Mayor Beaudry's celebrated polyglot imprecations!

Thus, while each day chronicles a failure, there every day reappears the belief that it needs but an act of Parliament, and a staff of officers to effect any end desired. Ever since society existed, Disappointment has been preaching: "Put not your trust in legislation," and yet, gentlemen, as I have endeavored to demonstrate, we are still too prone to a desire for over-legislation."

Are we, then, you may say, to stand still and watch the revolving wheel of time go round while we do nothing that will leave its mark upon the records of our day and generation? I answer most emphatically: "No." There is room enough for vigorous thought and decisive action in the field of these great questions which come naturally to the surface as the enlightenment of the world progresses. Whilst avoiding the mere inventing or hunting up of additional subjects of Government, we shall always find quite enough in legitimate and necessary spheres of work to occupy our most profound attention.

We have to retain our influence as an organization; we have to retain our respect which I am proud to say is felt in this city and throughout the country for the organization I have the honor of addressing to-night. The time has arrived, gentlemen, when a mere negative existence on our part will result in our being swamped by the rising wave of Liberal organization; the time has arrived when a mere passive expression of our cherished opinions, and honorable aspirations will result in the association fading away like the morning mist before the rays of the sun.

I am led to these remarks by the recent formation in our immediate community of what has the outward appearance of a very formidable political combination, of a powerful ally to the parties from

whose opinions in most essential points we conscientiously differ. We may call our opponents a party of ideas, and ours a party of solid realities, but be that as it may the fact remains clear to all unbiassed minds that the late visit of Mr. Blake to this city, and his reception by, and address to, the Young Men's Reform Club is deeply significant of the struggle which lies right before us, if we wish to retain the approval of our own conscience and the "prestige" which we have gained in the eyes of the people.

It is sincerely to be hoped that our efforts will not reveal themselves in the form of recrimination and personal abuse of those who are honestly opposed to us. A conciliatory and gentlemanly spirit will always accomplish more than the most violent denunciations. "*Suaviter in modo fortiter in re*," should be our watchword, and success will not fail to attend our efforts. And after all it needs no hypocrisy to accord a due meed of praise to those of the Liberal party who have done their best to advance the interests of the Dominion of Canada in accordance with the spirit of their own principles. From the days of Papineau to the present time, the Liberal party has figured far from ignobly in the annals of our country. For my own part I rejoice in a strong and healthy Opposition; it affords us scope for the free exercise of all our latent political energies; and is, in fact, the *sine qua non* of the very existence of associations such as these.

Did the limits allowed me permit, gentlemen, I would venture to point out further instances where a conciliatory spirit and charitable disposition should always exhibit itself. I suppose I may say that the bitterest war that ravages society in the present day is the war of religious denominations. Bigotry is rampant; intolerance is everywhere visible. Let so-called Liberal Reformers, such as Professor Goldwin Smith, think they are rightly employing the talents with which God has endowed them, by the scurrilous abuse of some belief whose existence seems a source of personal discomfort to their almighty selves,—I refer especially to Goldwin Smith's attack upon the Jews,—let such as he, I say, continue to take delight in such dirty work; but, gentlemen, I say, in the name of all *true* liberalism let us Conservatives shun and discountenance such narrow warfare. No wonder that Rationalism and Nihilism, and a hundred other "isms" are throwing their ghastly shadows over the face of the earth, when men are cutting each other's throats upon the disputed question of the very road to heaven! You cannot kill a faith or a superstition; you cannot justly even subordinate one religion to another. It remains, then, that till the clearer light of coming ages dispels the gloom from our little finite minds, we must place all denominations upon an equal footing, respect all, and protect all, so long as their course is worthy the respect and protection of impartial men. Let us not assail Christianity, or Judaism, or the worship of Buddha or Confucius; but rather acknowledge and search out the good which lies hidden beneath the surface of each. Let us look at men's lives rather than at their opinions; for I humbly venture to think that after all it is by our lives we shall be judged and not by our beliefs. Why should I fix my eyes so keenly upon the differences that separate me from my otherwise respected neighbour, when a far pleasanter occupation would be to set to work to find out and admire the wonderful identity which flows through all the creeds of all the ages.

And speaking politically, gentlemen, we must be aware how we fan the flame of religious dissensions. One spark may cause the most gigantic conflagration; and the fostering of these terrible religious differences, may, ere we are aware, hurl society on the American Continent into the horrors of civil war such as never before was seen or heard of. The liberty of the Press is a pillar of our freedom that I should be averse to see curtailed in any respect, but I must say that it seems in the present day as if some editors used the great trust committed to them for the exhibition of their own personal likes and dislikes in religion and in some other matters. The quality most lacking in modern journalism is that of high moral courage, courage to give, if need be, the devil his due, and to refuse to pander to the tastes of subscribers. Only a very successful newspaper can live without the ill-gotten gains of bribery. A true newspaper should reflect and *follow* public opinion; not seek to form and *lead* it into a thousand eccentric, and often very ill advised experiments.

And now, gentlemen, what is the secret why the attainment of true success is missed by so many of the ablest politicians of the present day? It is because the watchword of Duty is not forever present in the minds of those who seek to legislate. It is because the path of duty is too frequently departed from by those who would elevate themselves,—their own petty little selves,—upon the ruins of other men's interests. On such an important topic I will not speak to you in my own feeble words, but with your permission I will read what S. T. Coleridge said when some of us were boys, on this same subject of duty :—

“There are many able and patriotic men in the House of Commons, Sir Robert Inglis, Sir Robert Peel, and some others; but I grieve that they never have the courage or the wisdom,—I know not in which the failure is, to take their stand upon Duty. The devil works precisely in the same way. He is a very clever fellow; I have no personal acquaintance with him, but I respect his evident talents; consistent truth and goodness will assuredly in the end overcome everything; but inconsistent good can never be a match for consistent evil. Alas! I look in vain for the same wise and vigorous man to sound the word Duty in the ears of this generation.”

England's immortal Shakespeare, in his play of King Henry VIII, strikes this subject so fearlessly and so aptly that I may well be pardoned by giving a quotation from him :—Referring to Duty as the only true path to success in political life, he makes Cardinal Wolsey speak this from his death-bed.

“Cromwell, I charge thee, fling away ambition:
By that sin fell the angels; how can man, then,
The image of his Maker, hope to win by it?
Love thyself last: cherish those hearts that hate thee;
Corruption wins not more than honesty.
Still in thy right hand carry gentle Peace,
To silence envious tongues. Be just, and fear not.
Let all the ends thou aim'st at be thy country's,
Thy God's, and Truth's; then, if thou fall'st, O Cromwell!
Thou fall'st a blessed martyr.”

And in the "Merchant of Venice" he touches the subject of attempting to attain dignity and honor without merit.

"Who shall go about
To cozen fortune, and be honorable.
Without the stamp of merit? let none presume
To wear an undeserved dignity.
O, that estates, degrees, and offices,
Were not derived corruptly, and that dear honor
Were purchased by the merit of the wearer!
How many then should cover that stand bare!
How many be commanded that command!
How much low peasantry would there be gleaned,
From the true seed of honor! and how much honor
Pick'd from the chaff and ruin of the times
To be new varnished!"

Gentlemen, I have heard that in ancient times a frail barque was tossing near the shores of Greece in a terrible tempest. A mariner turned toward the foaming sea and prayed thus:

"O Neptune! thou canst save me if thou wilt; and if thou wilt thou canst destroy, but live or die, *I will steer my rudder true.*"

My concluding words are: Let us, each and all, steer *our* rudders true. If our principles in politics as in private morality, are founded on the eternal and immutable laws of equity and right our house will stand firm and unshaken when the waves of opposition dash against it. And when skies are clear and the success of the objects of our devotion is attained; when sweet desire is fully satisfied and results prove the stability of our ideas, and the justice of our aims, then we shall stand forth before the world, still calm and unassuming in our attitude towards our brethren of all shades of political belief, of all religions' colors and races: and glowing with over verdant feelings of charity, and love which cannot fail to be recognized and reciprocated by our fellow-men, and approved of at last when politics and ourselves are at rest together in the grave by the great Judge of us all.

